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Research Article

Bachelor of Fine Arts Graduates of the College of Architecture and Fine Arts in Bulacan State University: An Employability Tracer Study of 2021, 2022, 2023

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ABSTRACT

The employability of Bulacan State University's College of Architecture and Fine Arts Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) graduates, specifically those from the graduating classes of 2021, 2022, and 2023, is examined in this study. The study intends to assess alumni's current employment status, the relevance of their academic training to their professional roles, and the factors that influence their career paths and job satisfaction in light of the growing need to evaluate how well higher education programs prepare graduates for the workforce. Through follow-up interviews with a representative sample of graduates and structured online surveys, the researchers employed a descriptive study methodology to gather both quantitative and qualitative data.

According to the research, a sizable portion of BFA graduates work in creative and design-related industries like advertising, multimedia arts, graphic design, and teaching. However, some respondents reported being underemployed or who's employment in fields unrelated to their degree, frequently pointing to a lack of industry connections and a lack of career chances as the main obstacles. Additionally, the survey shows that employed graduates are moderately to very satisfied, especially when their academic knowledge and artistic abilities are put to use. Many alumni also stressed the critical role of internships, portfolio development, and being exposed to industry-standard tools and procedures while in college.

In order to guarantee that Fine Arts graduates have the skills and professional networks required for long-term employment, the study emphasizes the necessity of ongoing curriculum evaluation, improved industry-academe partnerships, and more robust career development support. Administrators, educators, and legislators can use the findings as a useful tool to create academic programs that are more industry-aligned and responsive.

Keywords: *Employability, Tracer Study, Fine Arts Graduates, Higher Education Outcomes, Bulacan State University*

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Introduction

The employability of graduates has become a crucial indicator of a higher education institution's success and responsiveness to societal and economic demands in today's competitive and quickly changing labor market (Teichler, 2015). Employability encompasses a range of skills, attitudes, and competences acquired from formal education and real-world experience in addition to a person's ability to find and keep a job (Yorke, 2006). Because of the dynamic character of the arts sector, changing market demands, and the sometimes project-based or freelance nature of employment in the area, employability poses special issues for creative fields like the fine arts (Bridgstock, 2011).

In order to produce graduates with both artistic potential and the fundamental abilities required for professions in design, multimedia, education, and allied creative industries, Bulacan State University's (BulSU) College of Architecture and Fine Arts (CAFA) is essential. However, BulSU must regularly evaluate the applicability and efficacy of its academic programs as part of its purpose to provide high-quality education in line with national development goals. In order to match, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) supports outcomes-based education (OBE) and institutional performance monitoring through graduate tracer studies (CHED Memorandum Order No. 46, s. 2012).

In order to gather post-graduation data that sheds light on employment rates, job relevance, skill match, income levels, and graduates' opinions of their academic training, tracer studies in particular have become a crucial tool (Schomburg, 2016). By identifying the gaps between higher education and employment, these studies assist universities enhance industry involvement, career support services, and curriculum design.

The employability of BulSU's CAFA graduates, specifically those from the cohorts of 2021, 2022, and 2023, is examined in this study. The COVID-19 pandemic's aftereffects, which severely impacted educational delivery and career prospects across industries, put these graduating classes in an especially difficult labor market (ILO, 2021). The purpose of this

study is to evaluate BFA graduates' employment status, the type of their jobs, their degree of job satisfaction, and the applicability of their academic training to their current careers.

The objective of this tracer study is to produce evidence-based suggestions for program enhancement by examining both quantitative and qualitative data obtained from alumni surveys and interviews. In the end, it supports Bulacan State University's strategic commitment to academic achievement and societal impact by attempting to add to the larger conversation on arts education, employment, and higher education policy in the Philippines.

Research Methodology

In order to examine the employment outcomes of Bulacan State University – College of Architecture and Fine Arts Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) graduates from the academic years 2021, 2022, and 2023, this study used a descriptive research design with the tracer study approach. In order to characterize, compare, and evaluate graduates' employment status, work relevance, job happiness, and perceived skills alignment, descriptive research is appropriate for this study (Creswell, 2014).

Research Design

This study used the descriptive quantitative research design. Stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents of this study. This approach monitors alumni's post-graduation career paths, including their employment status, type of work, and the ways in which their education aided in their success in the workplace.

Respondents of the Study

There are total of 31 respondents of BFA alumni from Bulacan State University's College of Architecture and Fine Arts who graduated in the graduating classes of 2021, 2022, and 2023 served as the study's respondents. Respondents who were available and willing to participate were found and chosen using a purposive sample technique. The respondents had to have verified contact information and have finished the BFA program within the allotted years in order to meet the inclusion criteria.

Data Collection Instrument

The graduates were reached through the social media – Facebook and Messenger, for they are the easiest ways of reaching out the graduates. The main tool used to collect data was a structured survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured into five primary sections:

(1) demographic profile, (2) educational background, (3) current employment status, (4) relevance of education to employment, and (5) job satisfaction and career progression. It was adapted from standard tracer study tools that were recommended by CHED and UNESCO. To guarantee clarity, relevance, and dependability, the instrument was evaluated by subject matter experts in the fields of education and the arts.

Data Collection Procedure

Due to time restrictions and accessibility issues, the survey was sent online via email and Google Forms in order to gather data. To increase response rates, follow-up reminders were sent. To learn more about a chosen set of respondents' employment experiences,

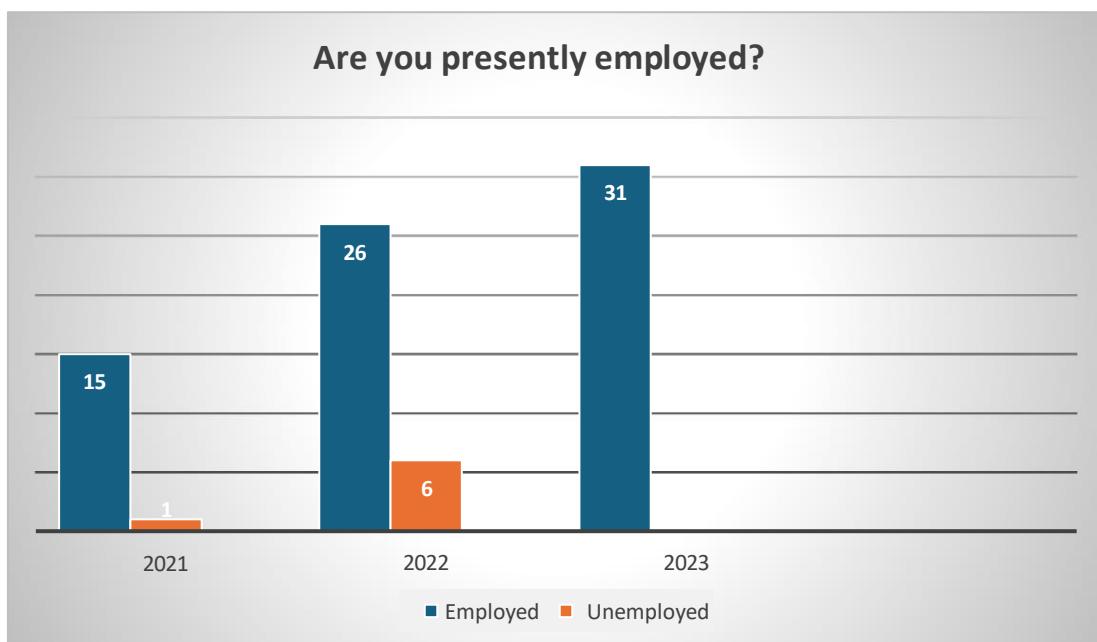
difficulties, and opinions on the BFA program, semi-structured interviews were also held with them.

Data Analysis

This study used the frequency and percentage distribution to analyze the job placement status of the graduates and the length of time in acquiring their first job. Frequency and percentage were used to examine quantitative data in order to compile the graduates' experiences and job trends. Thematic analysis was used to look for recurring themes and patterns in the qualitative interview responses pertaining to employability, skill relevance, and job satisfaction.

Ethical Considerations

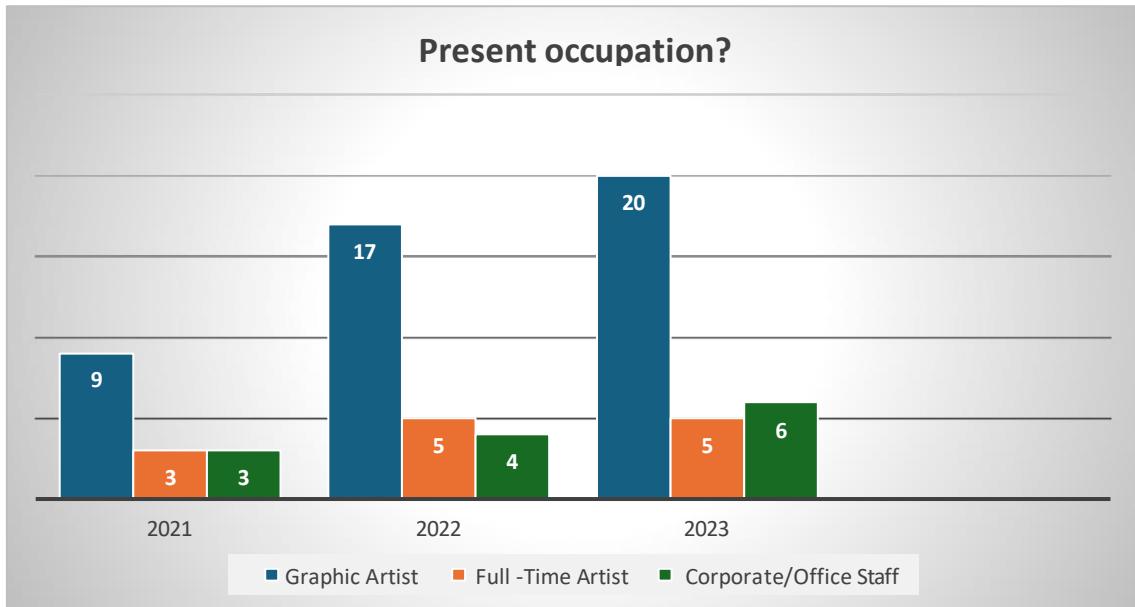
Ethical consideration was followed in this study. All respondents gave their informed consent, and participation was entirely voluntary. The identities and answers of the participants were kept completely private. Data were safely stored and utilized only for academic purposes.



Graph 01. Employment Status

In 2023, 39.2% of the respondents (n=31) were employed, the highest among the 3 cohorts, while 2021 recorded the lowest with

18.98% employed with 1 unemployed, this lowest employment record may be attributed to pandemic.



Graph 02. Present Occupation

Result revealed that 2023 recorded the highest number of 20 or 27.77% Graphic Artists, 5 or 6.94% as full-time artist and 6 or 8.33% employed as Corporate/Office Staff.

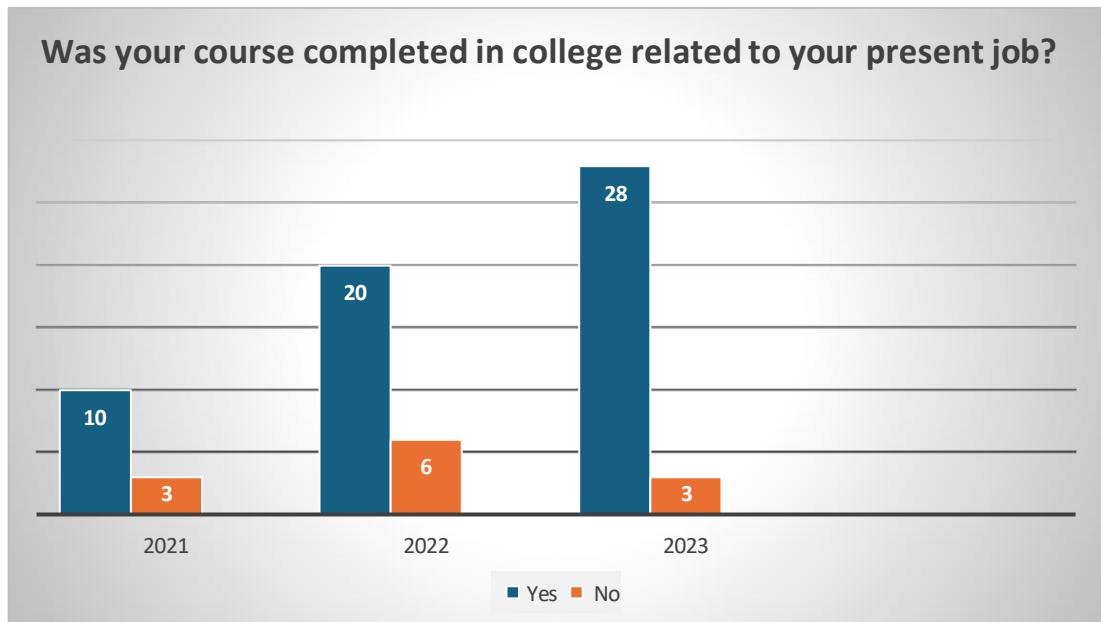
While in 2021, lowest recorded of 9 or 12.5%, Graphic Artists, 3 or 4.16%, Full-time Artists and 3 or 4.16% Corporate/Office Staff.



Graph 03. Location of Current Work

Graph 03 result revealed that in the year 2023 has the highest record of 23 or 31.94% locally employed while in 2021 recorded the lowest having 15 OR 20.83% locally employed with

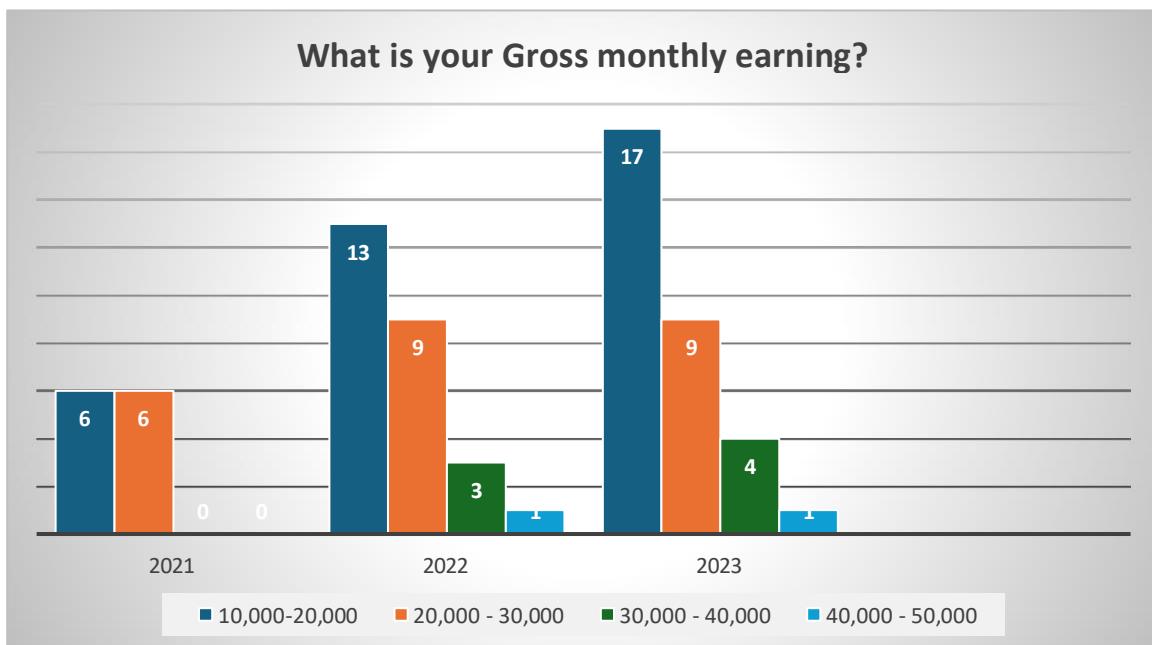
no record abroad. Despite pandemic, 2022 recorded the highest record of 4 or 5.55%, employed in abroad.



Graph 04. Course Completed in College Related to Present Job

The graph 04 result revealed that the year 2023 recorded highest in the related course completed to the present job, while in 2021 rec-

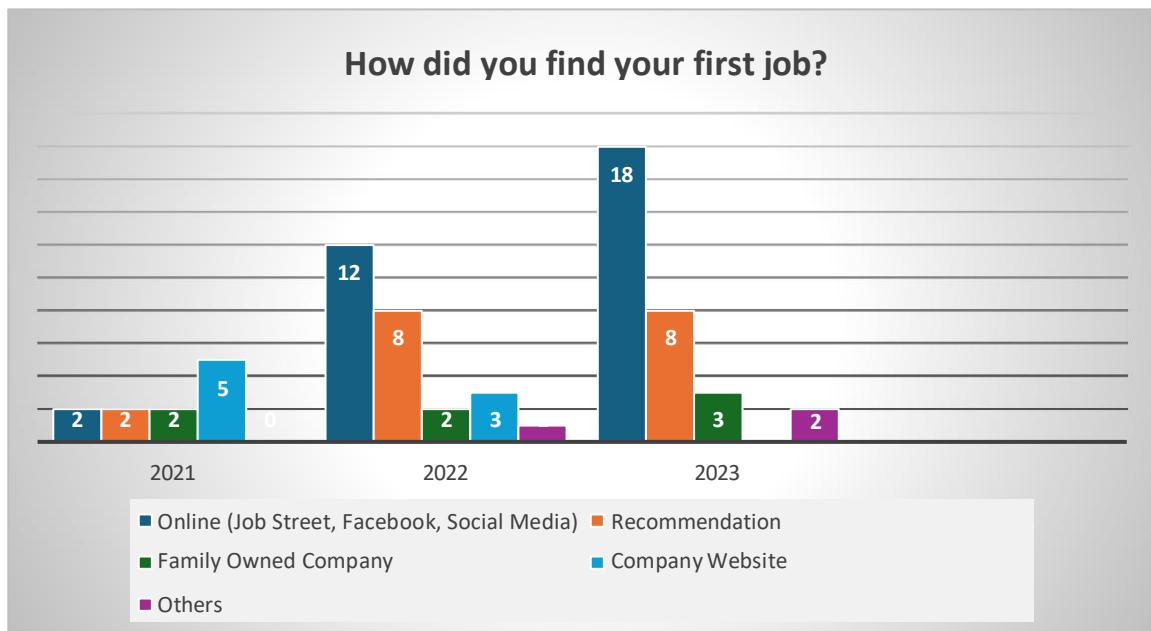
orded the lowest having 10 or 14.28% respondents with related course in the current job.



Graph 05. Gross Monthly Income

The graph 05 result shows that in 2023 recorded that majority of the respondents has 10,000-20,000 gross monthly income, followed by 9 respondents with 20,000-30,000 monthly

income, 4 respondents with 30,000-40,000 monthly income. And 1 with 40,000-50,000 monthly income.



Graph 06. How the Job was Found

Graph 06 result revealed that in 2023, 18 or 26.47% respondents found their job through online search. While, in 2021, 5 respondents or

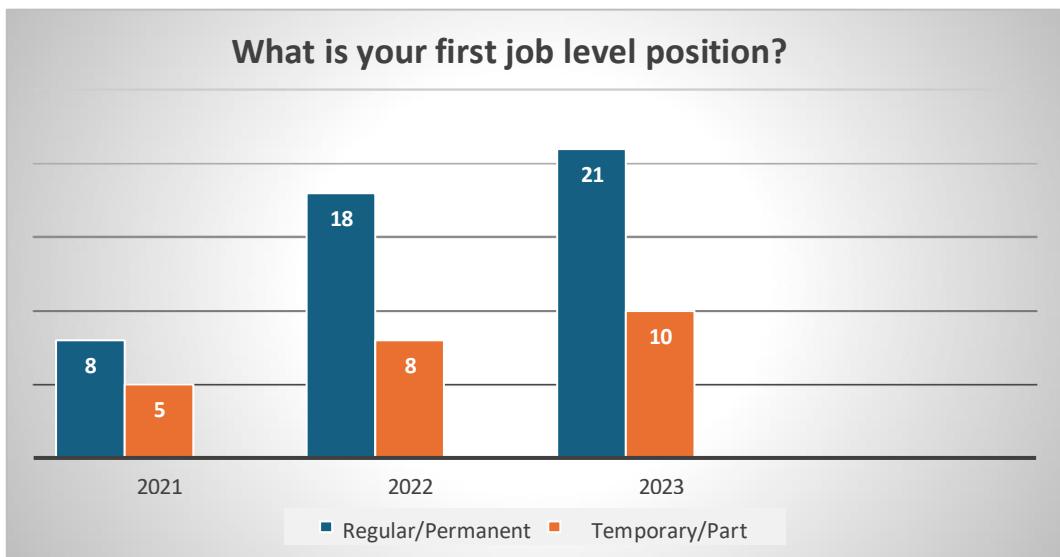
7.35% found their job through Company website. Only one respondent (1.47%) in 2022 found a job through other means.



Graph 07. Length of Time in Finding the Job

Graph 07 result show that 2023 has the highest percentage of 17.14% or 12 respondents expressed that they found their job a

month after graduation. While in 2022, 3 respondents found their job after more than 1 year.



Graph 08. First Job Level Position

Graph 08 result revealed that in 2023, recorded the highest 30% or 21 respondents have regular or permanent position in their first job. In 2021, recorded the lowest of 11.42% or 8 respondents has regular/ permanent job level position. Due to pandemic surge in 2021, employability rate is less.

Conclusion

The employment results of Bulacan State University's College of Architecture and Fine Arts Bachelor of Fine Arts graduates for the cohorts of 2021, 2022, and 2023 have been clarified by this tracer study. According to the statistics gathered, a significant percentage of graduates have found employment, and many of them are employed in fields that are directly related to their studies, like education, multimedia arts, and graphic design. This illustrates how well the academic program prepares students for the core artistic talents and skills needed by the creative industries.

Nonetheless, the study identifies challenges such as underemployment and career mismatch, suggesting that occupations are unrelated to their academic background. These results imply that although the program gives graduates a solid basis, job outcomes for graduates may be impacted by outside variables like dwindling industrial opportunities, shifting labor market demands, and economic volatility.

Additionally, some graduates mentioned difficulties connecting with professional networks and obtaining real-world experience, underscoring the need for improved internship programs and industry connections.

Graduates typically expressed that academic preparation was relevant to employment, although this suggests that curriculum content needs to be better aligned with new trends and technology in the arts industry. Additionally, graduates stressed the value of soft skills like communication, problem-solving, and flexibility, recommending that these abilities be further included into the curriculum to better prepare students for a variety of job pathways.

The significance of ongoing program evaluation and the application of focused tactics to increase graduate employability are emphasized by this study. Improving future graduates' professional preparedness will require strengthening the university-industry relationship, increasing career counseling services, and offering chances for experiential learning and portfolio building. The College of Architecture and Fine Arts can guarantee that its Bachelor of Fine Arts curriculum stays current and responsive to the demands of students and the creative workforce by tackling these issues.

Overall, the findings underscore that tracer study delivers useful information for academic

administrators, faculty, and policymakers in addition to serving as a standard for evaluating the present situation of graduate employability. These results complement Bulacan State

University's aim to develop professionals who are knowledgeable, flexible, and prepared for the workforce by adding to the continuous efforts to improve the caliber and influence of fine arts education at the institution.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are put forth to improve graduate outcomes and fortify the academic program in light of the results of this tracer study on the employability of Bachelor of Fine Arts graduates from Bulacan State University's College of Architecture and Fine Arts:

1. Curriculum Enhancement and Alignment
 - To guarantee conformity with contemporary industry trends, technological developments, and international best practices in the creative arts, the BFA curriculum should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.
 - Incorporate cutting-edge software, digital tools, and interdisciplinary techniques to better educate students for the changing needs of the design and arts industries.
 - Incorporate more project-based learning and real-world activities that imitate work contexts.
2. Strengthening Industry-Academe Partnerships
 - Increase internship and apprenticeship possibilities for students by establishing and strengthening partnerships with regional, national, and global creative industries.
 - Involve business leaders as adjunct professors, mentors, or guest lecturers to introduce students to real-world applications and contemporary market demands.
 - Establish an official alumni network to bridge graduates and employers.
3. Enhanced Career Guidance and Support Services
 - Increase the availability of career counseling services for recent fine arts

graduates, emphasizing portfolio building, interview techniques, and job search tactics.

- Plan frequent networking events, workshops, and job fairs with an emphasis on companies in the creative sector.
- Train graduates in freelance career management and entrepreneurship to prepare them for self-employment or creative freelancing.

4. Emphasizing Soft Skills Development
 - To increase graduates' preparedness for the workforce, incorporate soft skills training like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and flexibility into the curriculum.
 - Lead seminars and workshops on project management, client relations, and professional ethics that are pertinent to creative careers.
5. Monitoring and Continuous Tracer Studies
 - Make it a formal habit to carry out recurring tracer studies in order to collect input for program enhancement and rigorously track trends in graduate employment.
 - To improve program relevance and graduate performance, use tracer study results to guide academic planning, resource allocation, and policy formulation.
6. Support for Underemployed and Non-Employed Graduates
 - Create focused initiatives, including skill-building classes, certification programs, or brief specialized trainings, to help graduates who are underemployed or unemployed.
 - Encourage self-employment and innovative enterprises by making it easier for people to acquire entrepreneurial training and support services.

The College of Architecture and Fine Arts at Bulacan State University can improve its employability, better educate its graduates to face the demands of the modern labor market, and make a significant local and international contribution to the creative industries by putting these suggestions into practice.

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